

**Testimony Re: Raised House Bill No. 6616****AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY  
HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO  
IMMIGRATION STATUS****Submitted to:****The Connecticut General Assembly  
Human Services Committee****Submitted by: Yanidsi Velez, New England Regional Director,  
Hispanic Federation****February 13, 2022**

Good morning, Co-Chairs, Gilchrest and Lesser, Ranking Members Seminara and Case, Vice Chairs Gaston and Dathan, and all distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today. My name is Yanidsi Velez, and I am the New England Regional Director for Hispanic Federation (HF); a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance Hispanic communities through programs and legislative advocacy. HF's testimony is also informed by leading community-based serving and advocacy member organizations and partners committed to improving Latino outcomes and opportunities in the State of Connecticut as well as a partner of the HUSKY for Immigrants Coalition.

I am here to advocate in full support of Raised HB No. 6616, AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS. COVID-19 revealed that communities of color and immigrants have the least access to quality healthcare and disproportionately struggle to pay medical bills due to low-wage jobs and unemployment.<sup>1</sup> As we go into the third year of a global pandemic, and with 113,000 estimated undocumented uninsured immigrants in our state, this continues to be a public health concern. The pandemic wreaked havoc on our state, but most impacted people of color. Latinos experienced COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths at an alarming rate. Many served as essential employees working low-paying jobs doing manual labor, food service, and cleaning in hospitals, supermarkets, public transportation, and delivery services — these jobs required their presence.

They put their lives at risk to serve others and to provide for themselves and their families. Latinos and other communities of color have also suffered food and housing insecurity and unemployment at far higher rates than white Connecticut residents since the start of the pandemic. Many undocumented individuals do not visit a doctor due to the fear of immigration enforcement or the potential impact on their status. Additionally, the pandemic has resulted in

a large mental health crisis, and many cannot get the help they need due to the lack of medical insurance. All these compounded issues greatly impact the family unit.

Social and economic safety nets provided by the federal government in response to COVID-19 largely excluded immigrants, particularly the undocumented community. Undocumented immigrants and their families were denied stimulus support, unemployment benefits and the expansion of social benefits such as non-emergency Medicaid, SNAP, SSI, TANF, and most housing assistance programs. This was extremely disappointing since immigrants made up a substantial amount of the essential workers being exposed to the virus.

Undocumented immigrants in Connecticut pay \$145 million dollars in state and local taxes every year, yet they can't buy into Access Health CT and are ineligible for Medicaid, Medicare, and other state and federal health coverage programs. Healthcare is a preventative measure human right, and thus, Hispanic Federation supports the expansion of coverage for individuals regardless of migration status.

Expanding health coverage for all residents of Connecticut regardless of immigration status will provide health care to a wide variety of people: parents, workers, students. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving, growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that these individuals have access to health coverage. Immigration status should not prevent anyone from accessing healthcare or surviving. Investing in healthcare for immigrant communities is an investment in the future of Connecticut and will reduce healthcare costs in the long run. Savings to hospitals from reduced uncompensated care costs could amount to roughly \$63.3 million.

In addition, I want to add that although the current COVID surge is decreasing, we cannot deny that current and future surges and variants will continue to affect the population in general. Therefore, Connecticut's undocumented immigrants will continue to be in a health crisis without long-term, stable access to preventive and emergency healthcare. Without health care coverage, many individuals delay seeking care until their condition requires emergency department visits or hospitalizations. Early treatment effectively reduces the amount an individual will pay for healthcare in the long term by preventing health issues from developing further and worsening. Lack of access to healthcare means that chronic health issues, such as diabetes and heart disease, that could be prevented and easily managed or treated, develop into more serious conditions that require more medical interventions and become more expensive in the long run.

Today we respectfully ask you to pass Raised HB No. 6616 as we are in complete support of this bill that would expand Connecticut's HUSKY Health Insurance Program to all Connecticut residents under 26 years of age, regardless of immigration status. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you.

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1. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OHS/OHS-Health-Care-Coverage-Feasibility-Study-07-01-2022.pdf>